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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001303

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: REMARKABLE HARMONY IN DIYARBAKIR'S CELEBRATION OF WORLD PEACE DAY

Classified By: Jeremiah H. Howard, for E.O. 12958 reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Despite the heavy presence of police and checkpoints to search celebrants, and in contrast to past gatherings in Diyarbakir, the Democratic Society Party (DTP)-organized celebration of September 1 World Peace Day was remarkably violence free. Media report conflicting numbers of attendees -- estimates range from 20,000 to 100,000 -- assembled to mark the "'Yes' To An Honorable Peace"-themed gathering that included political speeches, Kurdish folk dancing, musical performances in Kurdish, and peace rallies. Contacts report a feeling of euphoria among participants and say local hopes for a lasting resolution of the Kurdish issue are the highest they have ever known. END SUMMARY.

BAYDEMIR: TAKE A BULLET FOR EACH OTHER

¶2. (C) A staff member in Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir's office remarked on the mayor's pride in wearing tradition Kurdish attire to the event, typically worn only during Nevruz celebrations in March. Delivering remarks in Kurdish and Turkish, and releasing white doves in a symbolic gesture, Baydemir underscored the importance of peace and said, "As a son of the Kurds, let the bullet fired at a (Turkish) soldier first hit me. Turkish intellectuals and politicians should say the same for the (PKK) guerillas. Because, neither dying nor killing will solve the Kurdish issue."

TRUSTING JUSTICE?

¶3. (C) The staffer told PolOff she heard that, despite the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) overtures about Kurdish language rights, GOT authorities had already opened an investigation about Baydemir's use of Kurdish at the September 1 event. (Comment: during a March 2009 meeting, Baydemir told us the prosecutor had opened more than 12 court cases against him for various offenses including using Kurdish in speeches and on invitations). Perhaps mindful of his legal situation, in his remarks, Baydemir took a swipe at Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Ilker Basbug's recent call on the PKK to lay down arms and trust the Turkish justice system, calling into question the "justice" of a system that imprisons children for making victory signs with their hands.

THE MEANING OF LIVE BROADCAST FOR KURDS

¶4. (C) From a political perspective, the staffer said, the enormous significance of a live broadcast cannot be overlooked. This was the first time major channels had aired

live a Kurdish celebration, including scenes of Kurdish folk dancing, Kurdish songs, placards bearing Kurdish peace slogans, posters of Abdullah Ocalan, and political speeches. The staffer said their contentment was tempered, however, by a deep disappointment in Minister of Interior Atalay's August 31 press conference where his rhetoric on a democratic opening did not specifically address Kurdish concerns. She said the DTP believed AKP was allowing opposition parties to bully it. DTP co-Chairman Ahmet Turk referenced this in his speech, warning that by watering down the issue, Atalay was ignoring the demands of 20 million people. Turk also urged the GOT to include imprisoned PKK leader Ocalan in the process, saying that he is ready to contribute to peace.

AKP MOTIVE IS IRRELEVANT

15. (C) A close contact who heads up a development NGO in Diyarbakir said the feeling among participants was euphoric. She recounted the story of her colleague who found an old woman weeping at one of the rallies. When she asked what was wrong, the woman replied, "Peace has finally come. I could never have dreamed this." Our contact said before, in particular when the AKP announced the TRT 6 Kurdish-language channel, there was skepticism about the GOT's motives and sincerity. Sincerity is no longer an issue, she said; "So what if the motive is electoral power? The important thing is the outcome. This doesn't mean we're forgetting the ills of the past, but we are more hopeful for peace than we ever have been."

COMMENT

16. (C) Recognizing the importance of confidence building, the GOT is clearly making concerted efforts to win the trust of the Kurdish people. In years past in Diyarbakir and other southeast cities, large gatherings of Kurdish celebrants -- no matter the occasion -- would often provoke heavy-handed reactions from a powerfully reinforced police force. During the September 1 event, media report only a handful of minor scuffles erupted at checkpoints and were quickly mediated by members of a local organizing committee. This demonstrates the commitment on both sides to a violence-free atmosphere appropriate for the theme of the day: an honorable peace. Less than a year after video clips of a Turkish police officer brutally breaking the arm of a 15-year-old Kurdish boy during a Nevruz rally were aired internationally, press report at the World Peace Day gathering police distributed to children soccer balls bearing the words: "Diyarbakir Police. We trust you."

JEFFREY

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